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The strike on the Erie and New York Central railroads

In 1877, the Erie Railroad was in receivership. It is not necessary for us to deal here with either the notorious manipulations of Jay Gould, Daniel Drew, and James Fisk, or their struggle with Commodore Vanderbilt and his New York Central system over control of the Erie.[1] Suffice it to say that by the time of the panic of 1873, it would have taken a financial genius to have kept the Erie in a sound financial condition. That year it was disclosed that Gould, as its president, had embezzled some ten million dollars of the Erie's money, and public confidence in the road was virtually nonexistent. On July 15, 1874, Hugh J. Jewett took over the reins of the bankrupt Erie as receiver and proceeded to make the workers of the road the chief victims of its long mismanagement. Jewett shared the typical outlook of railroad management of his day that his sole duty was to gain a profit for the stockholders of the line, and he did not hesitate to cut wages in order to achieve it.[2]

Early in June 1877, Jewett sent a memorandum to all employees that a 10 percent wage reduction would take effect on July 1. The announcement stirred the workers all along the line, and meetings were held in the several cities to decide on a plan to get the order

revoked. Finally, a committee consisting of fifty men from different points along the road was elected to go to New York City to talk with the receiver. An interview took place during the last week in June, in the course of which Jewett was told that the wage cut would mean earnings inadequate for the men to support themselves and their families, and he was asked to rescind the order.

Jewett replied that he was both surprised and hurt by the workers' action in organizing the committee, and that the order could not be revoked. However, he promised that if there was a change in conditions, wages would be restored to their previous level. He then reminded the committee that in ordering the reduction in pay, he had acted as an officer of the court, and warned them that the order would be supported by every court in every state through which the line passed. And since the road was in receivership, anyone interfering with train service could be charged with contempt.[3]

After caucusing, the committee informed the Erie management that it could make no final determination until it obtained the views of the workers who had elected it. It was clear that the key answer would have to come from the men at Hornellsville, New York. That town was the western terminus of the Susquehanna Division, the eastern terminus of the Allegheny Division, and the southern terminus of the Buffalo Division—in short, it was the most important junction for freight transfer on the Erie line. (The railroad switching yards in Hornellsville occupied about thirty acres.) In addition, the locomotive shops at Hornellsville—covering over ten acres—constituted the chief service center for the road. In 1877, they accommodated up to forty engines and employed over two hundred men. Added to these workers were nearly five hundred firemen and engineers who were stationed in the town, making it the place with the greatest concentration of Erie workers. Moreover, these workers made up the majority of the town's population, and the businessmen were totally dependent on them for their income.[4]

A day before the meeting was held in Hornellsville to discuss the Erie's answer to the Committee of Fifty, the *Utica Observer*

urged the men to be "sensible," and that "the best thing they can do is accept the situation and wait for better times."[5] The workers took this advice and, after a lengthy debate, voted against walking out.[6]

The Erie's management was much relieved by the decision, for Jewett knew that about 90 percent of the line's total business could be halted if the trains were not allowed to pass through Hornellsville. Moreover, there was no other point on the system at which the Erie's locomotives could be adequately serviced. Finally, Hornellsville was far from the large cities where there were great numbers of unemployed, making it much more difficult to get replacements for the strikers if the men voted to walk out.[7]

Indeed, Jewett was now so confident that the men would do nothing that when they reported to work on July 1, he ordered the members of the Committee of Fifty fired. He felt that, having voted against striking, the railroaders would not now reverse their stand. After all, in its report of the meeting at which the vote was taken, the *Hornell Times* pointed out: "Not even a large minority were in favor of a strike, much less any questionable means to make their strike effective."[8]

For the next two weeks, the company's confidence appeared to be justified. The men continued to report for work, and there was no word of any new talk of a strike. It therefore came as quite a surprise when, on July 20, the *Elmira Daily Advertiser* reported on its front page: "The great railroad strike which has been threatened for so long is fully inaugurated today. The strike began this morning. Hornellsville and Buffalo appear to have been the starting points."

What had happened was that the Erie workers, after hearing of the strikes in other sections of the nation, had presented an ultimatum to the company to the effect that unless their demands were met, they would strike at midnight on July 19. The demands were embodied in an eight-point proposal.

The first and most important was that all those who had been discharged for taking part in any meeting or for serving on the Com-

mittee of Fifty must be reinstated. The next four points were concerned with wages. Brakemen and switchmen were to receive $2.00 a day; head switchmen, $2.25 a day; trackmen in the yards were to get $1.50 a day, while those on the sections were to receive $1.40 a day. Firemen were to be given the same wages they had received before July 1, 1877.

The next demand dealt with ground rents. The company had forced many of its employees to live in houses owned by the Erie, and the rents for these shacks were exorbitant. (One worker later described the "homes" as "one-room shanties with a yard no larger than twenty feet square in which the occupants tried to raise a part of their food. As many as eight persons lived in each of these houses.") Although the railroad had cut the workers' wages 10 percent, it still maintained the same high rents.

The last two of the workers' demands were concerned with passes. The company had taken passes away from everyone, requiring the workers to pay for their transportation back to their homes from points where their work ended. The men asked that the monthly passes be reissued, and that pass rights be extended to brakemen and switchmen.[9]

The demands were quickly rejected. The company maintained, first, that the members of the Committee of Fifty had not been discharged because of that fact, but rather because they had absented themselves from work without leave, and for other "flagrant violations of discipline." It refused to take them back. As for the wage issue, the management insisted that the Erie was paying the highest wages of any eastern line before the reduction, and that the cut would merely serve to level off rates of pay. (It said nothing of the fact that the company's charges for ground rents ate up whatever difference may have existed between the wages of the Erie workers and those on other lines.) As for the demand that rents be lowered, management would not even consider the idea.[10]

When P.P. Wright, the company's transportation master, informed the workers that all their demands had been rejected, they were true to their pledge, and at one o'clock on the morning of July

20, the men went on strike on the three divisions of the road centering around Hornellsville. Later that same day, a committee representing the strikers served notice on the saloons in town that they were not to sell liquor to any of the railroad men until the emergency was ended. The strikers themselves took a "solemn obligation to drink no liquor" until their struggle was over.[11] All the newspapers reported this fact, and the *New York Times* commented that "a very creditable feature of the strike at Hornellsville is the entire absence of drunkenness on the streets."[12] However, the *Times*'s memory was short, for on July 26 it referred to the strikers as:

> . . . disaffected elements, roughs, hoodlums, rioters, mob, suspicious-looking individuals, bad characters, thieves, blacklegs, looters, communists, rabble, labor-reform agitators, dangerous class of people, gangs, tramps, drunken section-men, law-breakers, threatening crowd, bummers, ruffians, loafers, bullies, vagabonds, cowardly mob, bands of worthless fellows, incendiaries, enemies of society, reckless crowd, malcontents, wretched people, loud-mouthed orators, rapscallions, brigands, robbers, mob, riffraff, terrible fellows, felons, idiots.[13]

The last train to leave Hornellsville departed just after midnight on July 20, and by the following afternoon at least ten trains were stranded in the yards of the town. For the moment, too, no trains could reach Hornellsville; the Erie superintendent, on being informed of the strike, had wired all trains scheduled to enter the town either to stop or to proceed to their destinations by other routes. This order was designed to both keep passenger and freight trains out of the hands of the strikers, and prevent other Erie workers from joining the men on strike at Hornellsville. In general, both objectives were achieved, but a reporter for the *New York Times* noted that "in some instances train men thus disappointed in reaching their friends seized handcars and reached Hornellsville that way."[14]

From Hornellsville, the strike spread rapidly along the line of

the Erie. Port Jervis, Corning, Painted Post, Buffalo, and other points were affected as the Erie brakemen, firemen, and other trainmen at these places joined the strike and stopped the trains.[15] But Hornellsville remained the key to the struggle of the Erie workers.

Governor Lucius Robinson of New York had been advised by the Erie receiver of the strike in Hornellsville, and although not a single act of violence had been reported, he immediately ordered the militia units from Rochester and Elmira to the town. However, the same drama unfolded at Hornellsville as had occurred in a number of other struck communities. As soon as the militiamen descended from the train, the strikers "commenced shaking hands and greeting their many acquaintances among the soldiers."[16] The soldiers stationed a guard around the yards and expelled all people from the railroad property except employees on duty, but they turned their eyes away when the strikers crossed the line and prevented engines from leaving the roundhouse.

While the strikers were willing to let mail cars leave, the company was determined to run all trains, and on the morning of July 22, a section composed of an engine, mail car, baggage car, and two passenger coaches started out of the yards for Tiptop Mountain, the only way for westbound trains to get out of Hornellsville. Thirty soldiers were detailed to guard the train; five were stationed on the engine, two on the bumper, and the rest scattered throughout the cars. On the long flat stretch before the ascent of Tiptop Mountain—one of the steepest grades on the road—engineer Dave Cary threw open his throttle to build up speed and momentum. The train reached twenty, then twenty-five miles an hour. At the base of the mountain, Cary opened his sand pipe a little for traction, and fireman Matt Dewey energetically shoveled coal into the furnace, as the train raced up the side of the hill. Then suddenly, its wheels began to slip. The strikers' wives had prepared buckets of soft soap, and the men had liberally slathered it all over the rails for a quarter of a mile up the hill.

As the train slipped backward, the strikers on the hillside cheered wildly and threw on more soap for good measure. The engineer, by

making liberal use of the sand pipe, was able to conquer the grade, but the train could move only in spurts. As it slowed down from twenty to fifteen, to ten, to eight miles an hour, worried passengers began shouting. When it had almost come to a stop and was about to slide down again, the strikers rushed on board, shoved their way past the half-hearted militiamen, disabled the brakes, and forced all the passengers to get out. Superintendent John Biggs was speechless with anger. With everybody out, the strikers detached the passenger cars and sent them thundering down the hill toward the Erie freight yards. Engineer Cary was dispatched with the mail, and the troops and passengers were left to make their way through thickets and briars down the hillside to the Erie depot.

Half an hour later, persistent Erie officials started another train bound for Buffalo. The strikers jammed a switch, boarded it, bent its sand pipe, threw the engineer off, and expelled its passengers. Later in the morning, a third effort was made to start a train, but this, too, was foiled, and the Erie gave up its attempt to run a train out of Hornellsville that day.[17]

Not a single shot had been fired during any of the three episodes. The soldiers had been ordered to use only the butts of their guns. It was a wise order, for the familiarity between the militiamen and the Erie strikers was so great that if the soldiers had been ordered to shoot, they would probably have laid down their guns and gone home. In any event, the actions of the militia that day averted the kind of bloody massacre that had occurred in Baltimore, Pittsburgh, and Reading.[18]

But the *New York Times* was unhappy, and insisted that the soldiers be replaced by men who would act like the Philadelphians who had come to Pittsburgh. "We sincerely hope," it editorialized, "that when the next movement is made at Hornellsville, it will be with sufficient force and managed with sufficient energy and judgment to save our state from such disgraceful scenes as have taken place in Pittsburgh." What had "disgraced" Pittsburgh, in the eyes of the *Times*, was not the bloody massacre of men, women, and children, but the fact that the soldiers from Philadelphia had been

forced to remain in retreat in the roundhouse, and that railroad property had been burned.[19]

Responding to the demand for sterner measures, Governor Robinson declared martial law in Hornellsville and called upon "all authorities, civil and military," to keep the strikers from preventing those who wished to do so from working. "It is no longer a question of wages," the governor's declaration concluded, "but the supremacy of the law. . . . To the maintenance of that supremacy the whole power of the State will be evoked if necessary."[20]

As soon as the governor's proclamation was issued, the Twenty-third Regiment was ordered to leave Brooklyn, New York, for Hornellsville. These soldiers, having no personal ties with the strikers, could be relied upon to enforce the proclamation. At the same time, General Brinker issued an order prohibiting anyone not working for the Erie from going onto the road's property without military permission. In fact, anyone who even stated his intention of entering the yards without this permission could be arrested.[21]

After praising Governor Robinson and General Brinker, Jewett reaffirmed the policy of no concessions to the strikers. Nevertheless, the company attempted to run only one train on July 23—the one bringing the Twenty-third Regiment from Brooklyn to Hornellsville. The train met little resistance until it reached Corning, about forty miles east of Hornellsville. From that point on, it had to fight its way. The strikers had torn up the tracks in front of the advancing train, and the soldiers spent much of their time repairing the damage. Five miles before Hornellsville, the spikes had been pulled and the plates joining the rails removed. As the engine passed over this point, the rails spread and the train settled to the ground. This caused a delay of about two hours. Finally, at six in the evening, the regiment arrived in Hornellsville.[22]

The Brooklynites were immediately dispersed to guard the Erie shops and grounds. The *Elmira Daily Advertiser* warned the strikers that now things would be different: "The troops look and act as soldiers and when called upon for duty, will obey orders, no matter what the consequences."[23] It did not take long for the strikers to see

the difference. As soon as the troops were stationed around the company's grounds, some of the strikers tried to cross the guard lines as they had been doing since the beginning of their walkout. When challenged, the men made no answer, and a sentry fired a bullet over their heads—the only shot fired during the entire strike at Hornellsville.[24] The men left the area, and from that time on the military was in complete charge as the strikers remained off the railroad's property.

Still no trains left Hornellsville, and on July 23 the company invited Barney J. Donahue, a former Erie employee who had assumed leadership of the strike, and the strikers' lawyers, Miles Hawley and Matthew Bemis, to a meeting to try to reconcile the differences between the men and management. The spokesmen for the strikers indicated a willingness to accept the wage reduction, but demanded that ground rentals be removed; that promotions be based on length of service; that a ten-hour day be instituted; that the men be paid for the time they had to spend while delayed on the road, or when trips ended a great distance from their homes; and that the passes be issued to all workers as before. The three representatives also let it be known that even if all of these demands were granted, the strike would continue until those who had been dismissed for their membership on the Committee of Fifty were reinstated, since this had been the chief cause of the walkout.

In return for being granted an audience with company officials, the strikers' spokesmen stated that while all trains other than mail cars would continue to be stopped, no company property would be damaged. They stated that they wished "to meet the company in a spirit of candor and firmness."[25]

Bowen, speaking for the Erie, said he was glad the men were ready to talk reconciliation, but that the receiver would not allow the railroad to be run on any terms other than his own. While the dismissed men would not be returned to work, if the strikers went back to work they could rely on the receiver to overlook much of the damage caused during the strike and to retain those who had quit work. Before the interview ended, the counsel for the receiver

told the delegation that they should remind the strikers that they "were in contempt of the highest court of the state, and were violating [its] . . . strictest penal codes."[26]

Although the meeting left the issues as far from settlement as they had been before, the fact that the company had made the first move toward meeting with the strikers, and had even discussed the terms of settlement, caused the distinct impression that eventually this strike, unlike most of the others occurring on the railroads, could be settled by mutual agreement. For a time, however, this seemed to be only wishful thinking. No sooner had Donahue returned to Hornellsville than he was arrested by the sheriff and a posse of several railroad detectives on a warrant sworn out by receiver Jewett, who charged him with contempt of court. He was ordered to report before Judge Donahue (no relation) in New York City on July 27. Meanwhile, Barney Donahue went to the village lockup, where he was joined by four more strikers.[27]

The news of the jailings enraged the strikers and ended all talk of compromise for the time being. When concern was expressed that attempts might be made to rescue Donahue, he was removed to the depot under military guard and put on a train for New York. Even this did not still the fears, and an extra detail of soldiers was put on the train: "Men were placed on a handcar ahead of the train and as fast as any obstruction was found the train was flagged until it could move again."[28] The attempted rescue never took place, and the train eventually reached New York, thereby becoming the first to go the entire distance from Hornellsville to the eastern terminus since the strike had begun.[29]

The following day, however, turned out to be the last day of the strike. No trains other than the one that carried Donahue were running, and, despite the arrival of another regiment from Brooklyn, it appeared that no other trains would run until the strike was settled. Therefore, early in the afternoon, company officials met again with a committee of strikers and their attorneys. At this meeting, only slight concessions were made. The company agreed that Donahue's case would be left completely in the hands of the court, without

any attempt on the part of the Erie officials to influence the decision. For their part, the strikers' spokesmen deferred the right of the men to passes to the receiver's judgment.

Later in the afternoon, another meeting was held in the company's offices, and it was at this meeting that a tentative agreement for settling the strike was drawn up. The firemen and brakemen were to accept the 10 percent wage cut, but the trackmen were to receive the same pay they had been getting before July 1. No man was to be discharged for his part in the walkout, except those who had destroyed railroad property. But the reinstatement of the Committee of Fifty was to be left to the discretion of the receiver and his aides.

This last point proved to be the major stumbling block. The men representing the strikers insisted that it gave too much authority to the receiver, but they finally agreed to take up the issue with the strikers and to abide by their verdict.

At six-thirty that evening, the strikers met secretly in Hornellsville and, after a heated debate, voted to reject the proposed settlement because it left unresolved the issue of reinstating the Committee of Fifty. At this point, the doors to the building were opened, and a public meeting took place. There, several businessmen, a few members of the strikers' committee, and their two attorneys joined in pleading for acceptance of the company's offer as the best that the men could hope for. They argued that the company could be expected to reinstate the Committee of Fifty if the man who had dismissed them agreed, and that discussions with this official had indicated that he would have no objection to returning them to their jobs once the strike was ended.

But several strikers spoke out against accepting this type of promise, since past experience had proved that company officials were perfectly willing to make promises during emergencies, but broke them with equal readiness as soon as the crisis was over. Since the company had already been forced to make concessions, these men maintained, why not hold out until the workers' demands were fully realized?

When it appeared that the vote would be overwhelmingly for continuation of the strike, a group of leading citizens guaranteed to provide financial support for the members of the Committee of Fifty until they could find work again. While this proposal did not lead to an immediate vote to end the strike, it did prevent the company's offer from being rejected. It was finally agreed that another conference should be held with the company in an effort to reach a satisfactory agreement.

Again, the strikers' committee visited the company's office, and was told that the Erie was willing to sign an agreement immediately on the terms set forth that afternoon, but would not go beyond those concessions. The committee returned to report to the strikers; the workers accepted the proposals, and at a quarter after twelve in the morning of July 26 the strike was declared over. The "Great Strike on the Erie" was at an end.

In addition to obtaining a promise that free passes would be restored, and an agreement that the company would not press for Donahue's prosecution, the strikers obtained a concession not listed in the written settlement. During the discussions, their representatives had informed the Erie officials that the track bosses had taken an additional 3 percent from the men's wages, making the total reduction 13 percent. Claiming that they had never heard of this vicious practice, the railroad officials promised to remedy the situation immediately, and orders to that effect went out to the track bosses right after the strikers went back to work.[30]

The compromise agreement ending the strike at Hornellsville was extended to other Erie workers. It was the first of its kind on any of the nation's major roads during the Great Strike, and it spared at least one other line—the Union Pacific—from a crippling strike. Following the Erie agreement, that company made similar concessions that kept the men from walking out.

Editorial comment on the Erie settlement stressed that it was a poor precedent for management to have compromised at all in such a confrontation. The reaction of the *Elmira Daily Advertiser* was typical.

> The terms may be all right, and they may be wise. But it looks to us like a surrender. True, the trains are again put in motion, but not through the supremacy of the law asserting itself against the will of a mob. It is because the mob, for a consideration, has given its consent that business may be resumed. It is a recognition of the idea that the mob is co-ordinate in authority over the railroad with the officers and directors. It is a premium on strikes, and invites another whenever the men imagine themselves afflicted with a grievance.
>
> This is the precise position of the Erie road today. The road is running, but it runs at the mercy of its employees, and not at the command of its officers.

As an example of how the Erie management should have dealt with the strikers, the *Elmira Daily Advertiser* pointed to William H. Vanderbilt, president of the New York Central & Hudson, and majority stockholder in its subsidiary, the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern.[31]

The strike on the Erie had spilled over in Buffalo to the New York Central and the Lake Shore, whose workers had also suffered a 10 percent wage cut and were persuaded to strike by the Erie men. The railroad workers were quickly joined by factory workers, who quit work in sympathy. The New York Central strikers placed an embargo on all freight, but announced their willingness to let passenger and mail trains proceed as usual. The Central management then proceeded to mingle passengers, mail, and freight, hoping to force the strikers to stop the entire train and thereby become liable to punishment by the federal courts for hindering passage of the mails. But the railroaders stopped the train, unhooked the engine and mail car, and sent them on.

The New York Central countered by refusing to run any trains at all. The strikers then wired the postmaster-general in Washington, indicating their desire to let the mails go through and pointing out that they were being held up only by order of the New York Central officials. The postmaster-general asked the railroad for an

explanation, and received the reply from the general superintendent of the road that not a single passenger or mail train would be run until the strikers were dispersed, order restored, and the freight blockade broken.[32]

Apparently this satisfied the postmaster-general, for not another complaint was voiced by him against the railroad. Instead, the full force of the "law and order" machinery was directed against the strikers. To break the blockade, Governor Robinson at first dispatched the entire Sixty-fifth Regiment, and Mayor Philip Becker of Buffalo swore in sixty special police. When the strikers fought back against attempts to smash their strike, Mayor Becker issued a proclamation that anyone found in the streets after ten o'clock at night would be arrested. One hundred and forty more special police were sworn in; the city council applied to Governor Robinson for more military support; the Grand Army of the Republic veterans volunteered their services; and Sheriff Joseph G. Haberstrom swore in 300 deputies. Even then, it was necessary to bring in additional military forces before the blockade could be lifted; the Forty-ninth Regiment was sent in from Auburn, the Eighth Regiment from New York, and the Seventy-fourth Regiment from Hornellsville. Governor Robinson issued a proclamation informing the strikers that on May 10, 1877, the New York legislature had passed an act stating that any person who destroyed railroad property or obstructed trains was liable to ten years' imprisonment and/or a $1,000 fine. Then, to add weight to the law, Robinson offered a $500 reward for the arrest and conviction of anyone caught violating it.

With the combined force of 1,600 militiamen, the regular and special police force, several hundred sheriff's deputies, 1,800 veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic, and three hundred citizen volunteers, the freight blockade at Buffalo began to be lifted. But before the strike on the New York Central and Lake Shore was broken, eight strikers were killed by militiamen.[33]

Meanwhile, the strike on the New York Central had moved southward to Rochester, Syracuse, and Albany (but not as far south as

New York City). Up to this point, William H. Vanderbilt, of "the-public-be-damned" fame, had remained aloof from the events in Buffalo. He told the Lake Shore men, after they struck, that the 10 percent reduction would not be rescinded, "as the owners of the railroad cannot afford to let the employees manage it." "There is a great principle involved in this matter," he continued, "and we cannot afford to yield, and the country cannot afford to have us yield." Vanderbilt concluded by expressing "every confidence in the good sense and stability of a large majority of our employees," meaning, of course, the men on the New York Central line, and said that he felt that the Lake Shore men were "not equal as a class" to his own men.[34]

Despite Vanderbilt's professed faith in them, at the time he was making this little speech the New York Central workers were joining the Lake Shore men on strike in Buffalo. Ignoring this flouting of his judgment about the Central workers, Vanderbilt decided to say nothing further and leave it to the local officials to crush the strike. But he was soon compelled to break his silence. New York Central shopmen, switchmen, trackmen, and laborers in Albany met and drew up demands calling not only for the rescinding of the 10 percent cut in wages, but for an increase of 25 percent. It was impossible, they pointed out, to live on the 80 cents to $1 a day that switchmen, trackmen, and laborers earned on the New York Central, or the $1.20 a day earned by the best mechanics in the railroad's shops. The demands were forwarded to Vanderbilt at his summer home in Saratoga, New York, along with the information that if they were not met, the men would strike.

Reporters surrounded the Vanderbilt home and asked the Central president for his reaction. He released the following statement:

> There is a perfect understanding between the heads of departments and the employes, and they appreciate, I think, so thoroughly the identity of interest between themselves and us that I cannot for a moment believe that they will have any part of this business. I am proud of the men of the Central Road, and my

> great trust in them is founded on their intelligent appreciation of the business situation at the present time. If they shall stand firm in the present crisis it will be a triumph of good sense over blind fury and fanaticism.[35]

Even as this was being published, "the identity of interest" between the New York Central and its employees in Buffalo was being demonstrated by the murder of strikers by militiamen brought in at the company's request.

When the Albany men struck as they had vowed, Vanderbilt sent them the following telegram from Saratoga: "The public interests should not suffer from any differences between the road and its employes. Keep at work until the excitement is over, and a fair conference can be held."[36]

Thereafter, Vanderbilt pursued a policy of ignoring the strike. He insisted publicly that his men were "too intelligent and grateful to strike, but that they were violently prevented from working by outsiders." He told a reporter that he was "not informed of any strike on the part of the Central employes. They had been driven out of the shops by a crowd of rioters, and had been forced to stop work." The interview continued:

> Reporter—What about the demand for an increase of 25 per cent in wages?
>
> Mr. Vanderbilt—I have received no such demand from the men of the Central. A dispatch was received last night embracing something of that sort, but I would not insult the men of the Central by attributing it to them. No such demand has been recognized. It was not signed by anybody, and I have not paid any attention to it. The shops have been visited by a mob, and my men have been forced to quit work. The desperate men who have done this are not the Central men, but probably men out of employment who would like the situations of those who are at work. They belong to the "rough" element, and have coerced the Central employes to leave the shops.[37]

To all demands for an increase in pay, Vanderbilt replied that the company was losing money and that as a result, everyone associated with it had to suffer—a "fact of life" that he was sure the intelligent New York Central workers understood. The recent heir to a ninety-million-dollar fortune declared blandly:

> Our men feel that, although I may own the majority of the stock in the Central, my interests are as much affected in degree as theirs, and although I may have my millions and they the rewards of their daily toil, still we are about equal in the end. If they suffer I suffer, and if I suffer they cannot escape.[38]

Notwithstanding his refusal to recognize that there was a strike, Vanderbilt stopped all traffic until the strikers gave up (thereby ruling out the possibility of sustaining large financial losses), and also asked for troops to break the blockade. Governor Robinson called out the entire Third Division of the New York National Guard, located in Albany. Then, for good measure, he summoned the Ninth Regiment from New York City and accepted the services of a volunteer citizens' corps from Troy. By July 24, Albany had 2,248 men under arms. As in Buffalo, Governor Robinson warned the strikers of the consequences of violating the law of May 10, 1877, and here, too, he offered a reward of $500 for information about offenders.[39]

At a meeting in Capital Park, West Albany, on July 24, the strikers were addressed by John Van Hoesen, a young brakeman. Denouncing Vanderbilt for hypocrisy, he pointed out that when the workers in Buffalo had asked the Central president for bread, he had given them bullets. If that was to be his answer to the workers of Albany, he went on, then they would give bullets in return.

The very next day, Van Hoesen and other strike leaders who had shared the platform with him were arrested and jailed.[40]

On July 26, a committee of two was sent to Saratoga by the strikers for a conference with Vanderbilt. He agreed to interrupt his summer vacation to meet with the committee, but declined to discuss

the wage issue, declaring that it would set a bad precedent to succumb to the men before they returned to work and perfect order was restored.[41] The committee brought this discouraging report back to Albany, and the strikers met to discuss what to do next. The outlook for a successful strike looked dim indeed. General D.P. Woods, commander of the New York Eighth Regiment, had smashed the blockade in Syracuse and Rochester, and the strike in Buffalo was being drowned in blood. Albany was surrounded by troops, and their commanding officer had vowed to open the blockade, "blood or no blood." With their leaders arrested, and with the engineers refusing to join the walkout, it did not appear that the men could hold out much longer.

A strikers' committee approached Mayor Banks and other prominent citizens for advice, and received their promise that they would send a petition to Vanderbilt for a restoration of the former wage scale. The strikers then voted to hold out until there was a response to the petition.[42]

But the petition was never sent. Instead, the following notice appeared in the New York Central's shops and depots in Albany:

> The employes of this department will report for duty Monday morning, July 30, 1877, at 8 o'clock A.M. Those that do not report for duty at the time above specified will be considered as having left the service of the company, unless a good excuse or reason be given why they do not.[43]

Faced with this ultimatum, and with their resources at an end, the strikers at Albany voted to return to work and rely on Vanderbilt's magnanimity.

Similar notices appeared elsewhere along the line of the New York Central, warning the strikers to return on July 30 or face dismissal, and everywhere from Albany to Buffalo, the strikers voted to return in the hope that Vanderbilt would see the justice of their demand for the restoration of the former wage scale. By July 30, the strike on the New York Central was over. The Lake Shore men vowed

never to yield, but they also ran out of money and gave up on the thirtieth.[44]

On August 1, Vanderbilt issued a lengthy bulletin from Saratoga "to the employes" of the New York Central. "We have passed through a period of unparalleled excitement, occasioned on all sides by a common enemy," he began. He was proud, however, that few of the company's workers were part of that "common enemy": "Of this company's 12,000 employes less than 500 have shown any disposition to embarrass it," the vast majority having continued at work everywhere, "except when overcome by outside violence." (It would have been more accurate to have said that the vast majority quit work and were forced back by the "outside violence" of the military.) As a reward for their "loyalty and faithfulness," Vanderbilt ordered that $100,000 be divided among the men.

But what about the 10 percent wage reduction? On this issue, he would say only that it had been "fair and equitable," since it had been applied to all who worked for the company and earned thirty dollars or more a month—including even the president of the road. He concluded: "Your pay will be increased the moment the business of the country will justify it."[45]

When the strikers in Albany had voted to return to work on July 30, they had done so with the assurance—posted in the bulletin of the New York Central—that all would be reinstated. However, on the same day that Vanderbilt issued his bulletin publicizing his gratitude to the employees of the road, newspapers carried the following dispatch:

> Albany July 31. A hundred workmen were discharged from the West Albany shops of the New York Central for participating in the late disturbances there.[46]